

STATINTL

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Bombing Said to Bolster Hanoi Effort

By Jack Anderson

The latest secret intelligence reports suggest strongly that the bombing of North Vietnam is bolstering, rather than weakening, the Communist war effort.

There's no doubt that the devastating U.S. firepower has destroyed military supplies and crippled production. But the intelligence reports say that the North Vietnamese economy was already breaking down. Now Hanoi can blame it all on the bombing and exhort the people to put up with hardships in the name of patriotism.

Even before President Nixon renewed the bombing, the intelligence reports claim, North Vietnam was badly faltering. The economy had been strained by war and battered by floods.

This had caused a virtual breakdown of the distribution system. Farmers were hoarding their harvests instead of delivering them to the market. Only the black market was bustling. Smugglers and speculators were doing a brisk business behind the backs of the commissars.

Last year's floods were said to be the worst in 25 years. One CIA cable, quoting a reliable source, reported that "probably at least 80 per cent of the country's rice-growing areas had been damaged in varying degrees ...

"Livestock losses were par-

ticularly serious, primarily because of the loss of draft animals ... Hanoi had been saved only because the dikes had been purposely breached to channel the flood waters into the districts north of the city."

On top of war losses, this was more than the harassed North Vietnamese economy could stand. One intelligence estimate suggests that Hanoi launched the recent offensive, in part, to divert the people's attention from their economic woes. In a sense, the U.S. naval and air bombardment was almost welcome as an excuse to explain the staggering shortages and to overcome internal discontent.

There's no doubt, too, that the mining of Haiphong harbor and the bombing of the rail lines has disrupted the flow of military supplies. But this has also forced the two Communist rivals, Russia and China, to work together for the first time in 10 years to help their North Vietnamese ally.

Intelligence reports claim that the Chinese have agreed to permit a massive increase in Soviet rail shipments across China. The first shipments, which would have been loaded onto ships at Vladivostok, have already been diverted overland.

China and North Vietnam are linked by a network of rail lines, roads and trails which our own military experts ac-

knowledge cannot be cut off by bombing.

Because of the bombing, Hanoi has also brought pressure upon Moscow and Peking to increase their shipments. There's a good possibility, despite the bombing, that the North Vietnamese will wind up with all the military supplies they'll need.

Greek's Predictions

Our own private pollster, Las Vegas oddsmaker Jimmy the Greek Snyder, predicts next Tuesday's crucial California primary race will end in a "dead heat" between Democrats George McGovern and Hubert Humphrey.

Every other major canvasser has picked McGovern to win by a comfortable margin.

The Greek, however, thinks Humphrey will be saved by what is known as "Proposition 9" on the California ballot.

This is an environmental proposal which, among other things, would shut down corporate polluters, restrict offshore oil drilling, initiate a five-year moratorium on construction of nuclear power plants, and restrict pesticides.

Jimmy believes California's huge block of undecided voters will be lured to the polls by their opposition to "Prop. 9." His surveys show most of these voters will pull the lever over the Humphrey column.

A large number of the silent "undecideds," Jimmy reckons, are people who work in industries that would be restricted.

They should go for Humphrey, the labor-backed candidate.

But a lot can happen between now and the June 6 primary day, the Greek warned us. The three-part Humphrey-McGovern debates, in particular, could affect the outcome.

McGovern has the most money and a better organization, Jimmy conceded. But on the negative side, McGovern hurt himself with California's huge defense industry when he voted against a federal loan for Lockheed Aircraft.

Humphrey, possibly looking to the California race, quietly cast the deciding vote in favor of Lockheed.

It all adds up, says the nation's premier oddsmaker, to a neck-and-neck race.

Note: The Greek called two other primaries for us right on the nose, picking Wallace to take the Democratic prize in Florida and Humphrey to edge McGovern in the close Ohio primary.

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